

# The TV hoax behind 'Noah's Ark'

■ The man who claimed to have discovered Noah's Ark on Mount Ararat says he created the hoax to teach the media a lesson.

By DANIEL CERONE  
Los Angeles Times

HOLLYWOOD — The man who said he discovered the snow-covered location of Noah's Ark high on Mount Ararat in Turkey, and who displayed what he claimed to be an ancient piece of wood from inside the ark as proof on a CBS special earlier this year, now says it was a hoax.

George Jammal, an out-of-work Israeli actor living in Long Beach, Calif., admitted in an interview this week that he made up the story to expose those who produce and broadcast what he considers to be poorly researched religious propaganda.

Presented with this information by the *Los Angeles Times*, CBS said Friday it had decided to scrap two projects that were in development with Sun International Pictures, the Salt Lake City-based production company that made *The Incredible Discovery of Noah's Ark*, which CBS broadcast in February to an estimated 20-million Americans.

Part of the network's decision not to move ahead with the Sun programs, *Revelations* and *The UFO Phenomenon*, stemmed from the tactics Sun used several months ago to try to pry a confession from Jammal, including threats that CBS was going to sue him — which the network adamantly denies.

"All of this has clearly made us re-examine our business relationship with Sun, and we

won't be going forward with those projects," network spokeswoman Susan Tick said Friday.

But *Mysteries of the Ancient World*, another program from Sun examining such phenomena as the Sphinx, Nostradamus, the Bermuda Triangle and the Shroud of Turin, has essentially been completed and will air on CBS. That program has been carefully reviewed for accuracy by the network's legal department and program practices department, Tick said.

*Incredible Discovery* came under strong criticism because its case for the existence of Noah's Ark, as described in the Bible, was said to be based heavily on the views of creationists, who oppose the scientific theory of evolution.

"We're a motion-picture producer, and we don't take a point of view, creationist or otherwise," said Sun President Allan Pedersen.

Asked if Sun planned to revise its research techniques to prevent similar hoaxes, Pedersen said that such safety measures have always been in place.

"We certainly will be as conscientious as we can and scrutinize sources as closely as we can in the future," he said. "But frankly, we took the same due diligence before all this. My stance is that it's just about impossible to defend against that kind of well-planned and well-thought out deception."

From Jammal's perspective, the deception was painfully obvious. The "sacred wood" from the ark was actually from some railroad tracks in Long Beach, he said, and he has never set foot in Turkey.

"This is a scam that has been pulled on the American public, and it's gone too far," Jammal said from his home this week, holding the scrap of wood that he hardened by cooking it in an oven. Referring to Sun and CBS, he said, "They're foisting religious propaganda on Americans and making them believe it's true. So I hoaxed the hoaxers."

CBS does not plan to run an on-air correc-

tion. "A, there's no format to do it, and B, it's just going to attract more attention to this," Tick said. "Plus, the show never purported the wood was from the ark, only that this person on the show said it was."

When national news reports first surfaced in June that Jammal might have been lying, Sun stood firmly behind Jammal, who held to his story. Jammal's original plan to reveal the stunt in his own time was ruined when a friend of his who was in on the hoax — Gerald Larue, a University of Southern California professor emeritus of biblical history and archaeology — began talking to the press.

Sun producers called Larue the hoaxter, retained a lawyer for Jammal, presented an eight-page defense to CBS and wrote letters to *Time* magazine, the *Los Angeles Times* and others to defend their production. CBS, in turn, launched its own internal investigation.

Now, even Sun admits it was wrong. "We were obviously duped, and all I can do is admit to that," Pedersen said. "We'll take the portion that concerned him out of the picture for any future airings." That won't be on CBS, though, which will not repeat the program.

Jammal contends that Sun knew all along he was an impostor. After *Incredible Discovery* was broadcast, numerous scholars and critics of creation science, including Larue, wrote to CBS and Sun insisting that the show was bunk.

Why did Jammal finally 'fess up, after all this time?

"When I heard that CBS was going forward with more phony, religious, documentary, pseudoscience programs, that's when my volcano erupted," Jammal said.

When told Friday that his tactics budged the CBS network, he let out a belly laugh. "Professor Larue and many other scholars wrote letters of protest and nobody listened," he said. "Well, now they're listening and they're talking. I feel I made a difference."

November 8, 1993

Susan Tick, Spokesperson  
CBS Television  
51 West 52nd Street  
New York, NY 10019

Dear Ms. Tick,

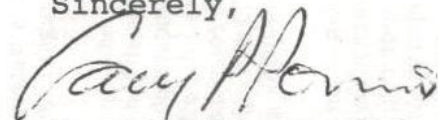
I was pleased to read your November 5 comments to the effect that CBS has "re-examine[d] our business relationship with SUN [International Pictures] and we won't be going forward with those projects" [on *Revelations* and *The UFO Phenomenon*]. But I was equally disappointed to note that another SUN offering, *Mysteries of the Ancient World*, has been "carefully reviewed for accuracy" by your legal and network practices departments and will air on CBS.

Perhaps your network's employees in those departments are unaware that the "evidence" endorsing such "mysteries" as Nostradamus, the Bermuda Triangle and the Shroud of Turin are as spurious as is the "evidence" for Noah's Ark. Before CBS perpetrates another intellectual crime on the American public, let me make you aware of the following three resources which, if they can't be found in the New York Public Library, can be easily and promptly obtained from Prometheus Books in Buffalo by simply calling (800) 421-0351:

- (1) *The Mask of Nostradamus* by James Randi (\$16.95)
- (2) *The Bermuda Triangle Mystery - Solved* by Larry Kusche (\$18.95)
- (3) *Inquest on the Shroud of Turin* by Joe Nickell (\$18.95)

Please be advised that if CBS-TV does proceed as planned to air *Mysteries of the Ancient World*, after having been made aware (by this certified letter if by no other means) of the intellectual bankruptcy of those alleged "mysteries," you will have no credible defense when the story of that fiasco is told; and your network's credibility will no doubt suffer another embarrassing blow.

Sincerely,



Gary P. Posner, M.D.

cc: Barry Karr, CSICOP  
Paul Kurtz, Prometheus Books  
James Randi  
Joe Nickell